

# TOPAZ

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nale; protecting coastal areas from potential saboteurs was another.

By May 9, 1942, 110,000 American Japanese had been moved or were on their way to 10 camps in seven inland states. Some 8,000 of those were at Topaz, which more than doubled the local population.

The camp was both a blessing and a curse to Millard County residents.

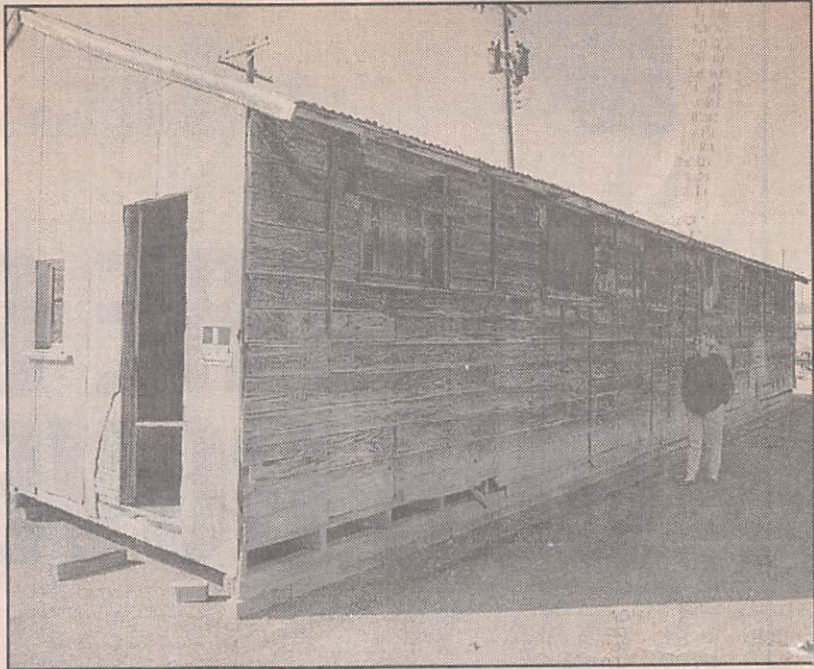
Chad Fidel, a college student from Delta who was training to be a fighter pilot, got a summer job helping build the camp in 1941. But he lost an eye — and his chance of flying — while mixing lye with cement at the camp.

Fidel spent much of the war in the Pacific after enlisting in the Merchant Marine and then returned to Delta where he again worked at Topaz after the war ended, this time harvesting wheat that internees had cultivated before the camp was disbanded.

The effects of the Great Depression lingered in Utah's rural counties into the war years. Jobs at Topaz bolstered Millard County's flat agricultural economy during the war. But Delta residents of the time remember store goods being in unusually short supply in part because of the camp's needs.

The camp was organized into 42 blocks with 12 barracks to the block. Some of the barracks were used as living quarters while others were used for dining, laundry, supply and school buildings. Between 250 and 300 people, never officially referred to as prisoners, lived on each block.

The barracks building at the Delta museum is unique because of the plans for its restoration. But there are dozens of other Topaz buildings around Millard County,



PHOTOGRAPHY/ STEVE FIDEL

## Director Charlotte Morrison shows barracks that housed Japanese Americans and will serve as a museum in Delta.

each sporting a slightly different facade.

When the war ended, the buildings were dragged away from the camp site for a number of uses. The museum's barracks was donated by the Eldro Jeffery family after being used for decades as a farm building.

From the back door of the museum's barracks, museum director Charlotte Morrison can point out two other Topaz barracks buildings that were absorbed into the construction of homes in the neighborhood. A keen eye can pick out others similarly remodeled around town.

Morrison said the barracks, once restored, will make the pilgrimage to Delta more meaningful for the Japanese visitors. The museum workers are reconstructing wartime history at a significant time: The 50th anniversary of the May 9 execution of Executive Order 9066, less than two weeks away, is

expected to bring a number of former Topaz internees to Delta.

The recollections of former Topaz residents are getting harder to come by as age reduces their numbers, Morrison said.

Millard County natives who lived out the war years in Delta or the surrounding farming communities are also proving to be a valuable asset in the museum's effort to preserve Topaz relics.

A fair amount of publicity surrounded the volunteer effort to move the donated barracks from the Jeffery farm to the museum at 350 W. 100 North in Delta. The move took place, coincidentally, on Dec. 7, on the 50th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Since then, older Millard County residents who have held onto furniture and other fixtures taken from Topaz 50 years ago have started offering the items to the museum for the Topaz project.





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